

LOCAL NEWS

By Elisabeth Deffner

Volunteers at the Heart of the ReCreation Experience

“The first time my husband and I dropped Jill off at camp, I literally stood there thinking, ‘What am I doing, trusting her with these kids? They’re just kids!’” recalls Kim Brown of Placentia.

“I stood in the driveway there, crying my eyes out. Did I pack everything? Have I done everything? Is she going to be okay? Are they going to give her her meds? Are they going to really, really respect her the way they say they will?”

“[My husband and I] went home and spent the entire week waiting for the call [that Jill was hurt], and it never came.”

That was 18 years ago, and Jill Brown has been a camper at ReCreation Camp every summer since. Jill, 35, has Down syndrome and autism—but that is far from a hindrance to her enjoyment of ReCreation, a program for teens and adults with developmental disabilities that is sponsored by the Knights of Columbus and run by Catholic Charities of Orange County.

For attendees, ReCreation Camp is the time of their lives; for their caregivers, it’s a respite—and for the volunteers who make the camp possible, it’s life-changing. “Most people keep coming back,” says camp co-director Katie Webb, “and not for service hours.”

ReCreation Camp has about a 99 percent camper retention rate (the waiting list to get into camp is lengthy); impressively, the retention rate for volunteers is about 75 percent.

To volunteer at the camp, “people are willing to take a week of vacation, a week of unpaid work, risk losing a summer job not knowing what they’re going to do after graduation,” says co-director Meghan Schinderle. (In fact, she and Webb are also volunteers; theirs are not paying positions.)

It’s a comfort to families like the Browns when they spot veteran counselors, says Kim Brown, who describes it as a “battery recharge” to see someone who cares enough to come back. But after all these years, it’s also touching to see the naked anxiety on the faces of first-time counselors.

“They have that deer-in-the-headlights look—‘Oh, what have I gotten myself into?’” she says with a laugh. “But that’s the beginning of the week, and when we come back to pick Jill up, they’re just totally transformed.”

This year’s camp—with 93 campers, the biggest in the 32-year history of ReCreation—ran June 27 – July 4 at the Marywood Pastoral Center in Orange; and, thanks to the Knights of Columbus sponsorship, campers attended for free.

Every camp is unique, yet returning camp-



ReCreation Camp camper Michael Santa Maria and three staff members share peace during Mass.

ers and counselors alike know what to expect. Meals are a highlight of the day (attendees have to cheer to get their food). Each day includes Mass and a schedule of music, art, and crafts classes. Evenings are the time for camp-wide programs and activities, from talent shows to movie nights to karaoke. And each evening ends with a flameless “campfire” gathering around the fountain at the heart of Marywood.

Webb, a business analyst with American

Express, and Schinderle, program director for nonprofit organization Life Rolls On, have been co-directing ReCreation Camp for three years, but their history with the camp began when they were in high school. They describe the experience as profound.

The pair speak warmly about seeing new generations of volunteers experience that same positive impact. Volunteers range from 16 to 30 years old—not necessarily an age group known for volunteerism. “To see that age group being completely selfless is just amazing,” says Webb.

Volunteers undergo an orientation process that lasts close to two full days. They discuss different scenarios, learn first aid, and pick up behavior modification tricks and tools. The goal is to prepare them for anything and everything they might experience during a week of camp.

Matching each volunteer with a suitable camper, or “buddy,” is also a huge priority. “We’re not going to put newbie counselors with more challenging campers,” says Schinderle. “We want to make sure everybody has the time of their lives.”

“It’s one of those really special places, because people are willing to come together,” says Webb. “Everyone is there for all the right reasons.”

“You get a renewed sense of your priorities when you leave here,” adds Schinderle. “People help you rise to the occasion.”

“It’s an amazing gift,” says Brown simply. “It’s like letting a butterfly out of a bottle.”

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For more information about ReCreation Camp, go to www.recreationcampoc.com or email camp@ccoc.org.

Episcopal Appointments

Bishop Tod D. Brown

- Saturday August 22 Anaheim Dedication of New Building St. Thomas Korean Center
- Tuesday August 25 Utah 100th Anniversary of Cathedral of Madeline Salt Lake City
- Friday August 28 Rancho Santa Margarita Back to School Convocation Mass (SMCHS) San Francisco Solano Church
- Monday August 31 Orange Serra Club Honoring Newly Ordained Priests Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse
- Friday September 11 Orange Council of Priests Meeting Marywood Pastoral Center
- Saturday September 12 Orange IPM Mini-Congress Marywood Pastoral Center

Bishop Dominic Luong

- Monday-Thursday August 24-27 San Jose National Priests Convocation
- Monday August 31 Orange Serra Club Honoring Newly Ordained Priests Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse
- Friday-Sunday September 4-6 Anaheim Southern California Renewal Convention

Bishop Cirilo Flores

- Sunday August 16 Riverside Eucharistic Celebration for Jovenes Para Cristo, XXIII Annual Encounter Riverside Convention Center
- Sunday August 23 Orange Vietnamese Bilingual Religious Education Program Annual Catechists Convention Marywood Pastoral Center
- Friday August 28 Rancho Santa Margarita Priests Convocation San Francisco Solano Church
- Saturday August 29 Huntington Beach Prayer Service in Thanksgiving Ss. Simon and Jude Church
- Monday August 31 Orange Serra Club Honoring Newly Ordained Priests Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse
- Friday-Monday September 4 – 26 Rome New Bishop Conference

ORANGE COUNTY CATHOLIC MISSION STATEMENT

To illuminate and animate the journey of faith of the Catholics of the Diocese of Orange through the reporting of timely, useful and instructive local, national and world news, commentary and features in an attractive and accessible manner.